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History, Politics and Postmodernism: Stuart Hall and Cultural Studies

I. Stuart Hall on Ideology, Hegemony, and the Social Formation

Living with Difference

It is both surprising and understandable that British marxist cultural studies, in the works of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, has recently had a significant and influential impact in the United States, especially for communication scholars. (Bits and pieces of it have been appropriated before by other disciplines, such as education and sociology.) There are many reasons for the resistance in the past: the publications are dispersed and often difficult to find; the language is often explicitly defined by its links to and debates with contemporary continental philosophy and theory; and the "position's" commitment to the ongoing and practical nature of theorizing contravenes common notions of theoretical stability in the social sciences. There are also many reasons for the sudden interest: the dissatisfaction with available theoretical paradigms and research programs, the increasing politicization of the academy, the slow incorporation of continental philosophies into the graduate curriculum, and perhaps, most powerfully, the recent visibility of Stuart Hall in the United States. Those who have been working in this tradition for some time might, understandably, be a bit suspicious of this current interest, even as it is welcomed, for like all intellectual traditions, marxist cultural studies, even in the work of a single author like Hall, is a complex and contradictory terrain, with its own histories, debates and differences.

It is difficult to identify a single position, concern, tradition or method in Hall's work, or to assign specific arguments to a single theoretical level or "empirical" arena. The "multi-accentuality" of his work is magnified by his commitment to modes of collective intellectual work and authorship (forthcoming 'b'). His "author-ity" extends far beyond those texts he himself has authored; he is as much a teacher and an activist as a writer. As a founding member of the "New Left" in England and the first editor of the influential *New Left Review*, as one of those crucially responsible for the definition and institutionalization of "cultural studies" during his tenure at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, and as a leading figure in the attempt to forge a new marxism—both intellectual and practical—since moving to the Open University, his work embodies an ongoing project, realized in an explicit dialogue with others and characterized above all by a modesty and generosity, as much in his descriptions of people in concrete historical situations as in his

considerations of other positions. Anyone who has had the pleasure of hearing or meeting Hall knows the special quality of his presence, a presence that combines his political and intellectual passion with the commitment to human decency that pervades all his interactions.¹

In fact, Hall's own discursive practice exemplifies those commitments. His engagement with other writers embodies a "critical dialogue": he simultaneously borrows and distances himself from them, struggling with their texts, reinflecting them into his own understanding of history as an active struggle. History and theory—both enact an ongoing process of what Gramsci called "destruction and reconstruction" or, in Hall's terms, "de- and re-articulation" (although Hall tends to use "articulation" when talking about cultural or signifying practices). While many increasingly acknowledge the need for theoretical complexity, Hall elaborates and concretizes that demand as he moves from the more abstract to the more concrete. He rarely claims that the questions he addresses are sufficient, merely that they are often ignored. He does not offer his answers as authoritative; he seeks rather to open up new fields of exploration and critical reflection, to put on the agenda of the Left whatever is being kept off, to challenge that which we take for granted. His theoretical advances are offered, not as the end of a debate, but as the ongoing attempt to understand the complexity, contradictions and struggles within the concrete lives of human beings. Yet the model of his practice—as a writer, teacher, theoretician, cultural critic and political strategist—and the middle ground he constantly tries to occupy, can be extended beyond the debates he addresses. It is this commitment to struggle, at all levels, which constitutes the center of his current position and the theme of his latest work.

Nevertheless, Hall does write from a particular position, defined in part by his own social and intellectual history. The latter is likely to be unfamiliar to many communications scholars. Hall works within both marxist and semiotic discourses which attempt to understand the nature of contemporary social life and the central place of communication within it. To try, in the name of generalization, to eliminate either his fundamental concern with power and historical change, or the real theoretical advances, over a broad range of issues, accomplished in his vocabulary, would be a disservice. Moreover, it would be a distortion of Hall's work not to recognize that his position has changed, over time, in response to new theoretical and historical questions; old concepts and strategies have occasionally disappeared from his writing, but more commonly, they are reappropriated into a new theoretical formation which rearticulates not only their significance but their political challenge as well. In what follows, then, I will try to move between the abstraction and the detail, offering a map of Hall's own current strategies and struggles.

For Hall, all human practices (including communication and communication theory) are struggles to "make history but in conditions not of our own making." He brings this marxist maxim to bear upon at least three different, albeit related projects: (1) to offer a theory of ideology which sees communicative practices in terms of what people can and do make of them; (2) to describe the particular historical form of contemporary cultural and political struggle (hegemony); and (3) to define a "marxism without guarantees" by rethinking the "conjunctural" nature of society. At each of these levels, Hall connects, in complex ways, theory and writing to real social practices and struggles.

There can be no radical separation between theory, at whatever level of abstraction, and the concrete historical context which provides both its object of study and its conditions of existence. This is not merely a political position (although it is that); it is also an epistemological one. Hall extends the marxist attempt to "reproduce the concrete in thought" with Benjamin's comparison of the

magician and the surgeon: the magician acts upon the surface of reality, the surgeon cuts into it. (It is not coincidental that Benjamin's metaphor describes the new media technology, specifically photography.) Rejecting the "magical incantations" of the empiricist who claims to have secure access to the real (even in its marxist forms: e.g., theories of false consciousness), Hall (1980a) seeks "concepts with which to cut into the complexity of the real, in order precisely to reveal and bring to light relationships and structures which cannot be visible to the naive naked eye," relations of power and contradiction, of domination and struggle. Hall disclaims abstract and universal theory; rather, his epistemology derives from a reading (1974) of Marx which sees the relation between conceptual and empirical reality as a constant movement between different levels of abstraction. Hall also refuses the relativism of rationalism: although theories and descriptions are always ideological, their "truth" is measured in the context of concrete historical struggles, their adequacy judged by the purchase they give us for understanding the complex and contradictory structure of any field of social practices, for seeing beyond the taken-for-granted to the ongoing struggles of domination and resistance.

At whatever level of abstraction, Hall's fundamental commitment is to a structuring principle of struggle, not as an abstract possibility, but as a recognition that human activity at all levels always takes place within and over concretely "contested terrain." For example, against those who would reduce the politics of culture to a simple economic relation of domination, Hall (1984a) argues that

we must not confuse the practical inability to afford the fruits of modern industry with the correct popular aspiration that modern people know how to use and master and bend to their needs and pleasures modern things....In part, of course, this is the product of a massively capitalised swamp advertising campaign. But more importantly, it is also a perfectly correct perception that this is where modern technology is, these are languages of calculation of the future...Not to recognize the dialectic in this is to fail to see where real people are...

By identifying the possibilities of struggle within any field, Hall occupies the middle ground between those who emphasize the determination of human life by social structures and processes, and those who, emphasizing the freedom and creativity of human activity, fail to recognize its historical limits and conditions: a middle ground in which people constantly try to bend what they are given to their own needs and desires, to win a bit of space for themselves, a bit of power over their own lives and society's future.

Hall seeks to define a nonreductionist theory of determination and social practices, of ideology, culture and politics. The concept of "articulation" signals his attempt to rethink the dialectic of determination as struggle; it marks his movement of this marxist problematic onto the terrain of structuralist theory while simultaneously registering the limit he places upon the "riot of deconstruction" (1985), a movement which is determined in part by his more recent non-humanist rereading (1986; cf. Hall et al., 1977b) of Gramsci. Structuralism argues that the identity of a term is not pregiven, inherent in the term itself but rather, is the product of its position within a system of differences. Thus, as Hall himself has said, it was structuralism (and particularly Althusser) that taught him to "live with difference." For Hall, the meaning and politics of any practice is, similarly, the product of a particular structuring of the complex relations and contradictions within which it exists. "Articulation" refers to the complex set of historical practices by which we struggle to produce identity or structural unity out of, on top of, complexity, difference, contradiction. It signals the absence of guarantees, the inability to know in advance the historical

significance of particular practices. It shifts the question of determination from origins (e.g., a practice is defined by its capitalist or working class genesis) to effects. It is the struggle to articulate particular effects in history that Hall seeks to find at every level, and in every domain of social life.

Marxism Without Guarantees

Although Hall is best known for his work in cultural theory and ideological analysis, the power of the concept of "articulation" is perhaps more clearly illustrated by his "conjunctural theory" of the social formation. Here, Hall's middle ground between "culturalism" and "(post)structuralism" is explicitly theorized (1980a, 1983). What is the nature of society and of the structural determinations operating within it? In the "culturalist" position, the coherence and totality of a particular social structure (and the nature of the power relations within it) are already given, defined as a series of correspondences between different levels of social experiences, cultural practices, economic and political relations. Society is an "expressive totality" in which every practice refers back to a common origin. A chain of equivalences is constructed: for example, a particular class = particular experiences = particular political functions = particular cultural practices = particular needs and interests = a particular position in the economic relations of capital. That is, a particular social identity corresponds to particular experiences, defines a particular set of political interests, roles and actions, has its own "authentic" cultural practices, etc. What determines this network of correspondences, what defines and guarantees this system's existence is—whether in the first or the last instance—the economic. Culturalism is a theory of necessary correspondences in which the meaning and politics of every action are already defined, guaranteed in the end by its origin in the class struggle or by its stable place in the contradictions of capital. As a theory of power, struggle and contestation are possible only by appealing to an abstract principle of human nature: the question of agency is necessarily transformed into one of creativity; the subject is somehow determining but indeterminate.

On the other hand, in the "(post)structuralist" position, structural unity and identity are always deconstructed, leaving in their place the complexity, contradictions and fragmentation implied in difference. There are no necessary relations, no correspondences; that is guaranteed outside of any concrete struggle. What something is (including the social formation) is only its relations to what it is not, its existence in a nominalist field of particular others. Any structure or organization is to be dismantled: one can build neither theory nor struggle upon it. With any unitary nature denied, society can only be seen as a network of differences within which power operates "microphysically" (i.e., absolutely nonhierarchically). Similarly, the identification of the historical agent with a creative subject is broken. The actor is fragmented and its intentions "decentered" from any claim of origination/determination. Agency is nothing but the product of the individual's insertion into various and contradictory codes of social practice: the speaker is always already spoken. Thus, the social totality is dissolved into a pluralism of powers, practices, subject-positions. This is a theory of necessary noncorrespondence, in which the lack of identity and structure is guaranteed, in which there can be no organization of power (as either a system of domination structured by certain more fundamental contradictions or a coherent structure of resistance.) Resistance itself is comprehensible only by appealing to an abstract principle of the unconscious or the repressed.

At this level, the concept of "articulation" marks Hall's unwillingness to accept the necessity of either correspondence or noncorrespondence, either the simple unity or the absolute complexity of the social formation. He argues that correspondences are historically produced, the site of the struggle over power.

Society is, for Hall, a complex unity, always having multiple and contradictory determinations, always historically specific. This "conjunctural" view sees the social formation as a concrete, historically produced organization—a "structure-in-dominance"—of the different forms of social relations, practices and experiences. Each form of social practice (political, economic and cultural) has its own specificity or "relative autonomy"; each has its own specific field of effects, particular transformations that it produces and embodies. But the effects of any concrete practice—its conjunctural identity—are always "overdetermined" by the network of relations in which it is located. For Hall, the struggle is over how particular practices are positioned, into what structures of meaning and power, into what correspondences, they are articulated.

Hall (1983) offers a "marxism without guarantees," a theory of "no necessary (non/) correspondence," in which history is the struggle to produce the relations within which particular practices have particular meanings and effects, to organize practices into larger structures, to "inflect" particular practices and subject-positions into relations with political, economic and cultural structures of domination and resistance. Hall's marxism demands that we seek to understand the concrete practices by which such articulations are accomplished and the contradictions around which struggles are and can be organized. The theory of articulation is the assertion of struggle over necessity, struggles both to produce structures of domination and to resist them. (It is perhaps also meant to remind the left of an important lesson: "pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will.")

It offers a different version of determination, a rigorously anti-reductionist model of the production of social life as a field of power. Furthermore, Hall argues that these systems of power are organized upon contradictions, not only of class and capital, but of gender and race as well; these various equally fundamental contradictions may or may not be made to correspond—this is yet another site of articulation and power. Hall's theory offers, as well, a nonessentialist theory of agency: social identities are themselves complex fields of multiple and even contradictory struggles; they are the product of the articulations of particular social positions into chains of equivalences, between experiences, interests, political struggles and cultural forms, and between different social positions. This is a fragmented, decentered human agent, an agent who is both "subject-ed" by power and capable of acting against those powers. It is a position of theoretical antihumanism and political humanism, for without an articulated subject capable of acting, no resistance is possible.

Culture and Ideology

These same principles and practices define Hall's (1977, 1982, 1983, 1985) contribution to the theory of culture and ideology. Culture is never merely a set of practices, technologies or messages, objects whose meaning and identity can be guaranteed by their origin or their intrinsic essences. For example, Hall (1984b) argues that

there is no such thing as "photography"; only a diversity of practices and historical situations in which the photographic text is produced, circulated and deployed... And of course, the search for an "essential, true original" meaning is an illusion. No such previously natural moment of true meaning, untouched by the codes and social relations of production and reading, exists.

Cultural practices are signifying practices. Following Volosinov as well as the structuralists, Hall argues that the meaning of a cultural form is not intrinsic to it; a text does not offer a transparent surface upon or through which we may discern its meaning in some nontextual origin, as if it had been deposited there,

once and for all, at the moment of its origin. The meaning is not in the text itself but is the active product of the text's social articulation, of the web of connotations and codes into which it is inserted. Hall (1981) writes: "The meaning of a cultural symbol is given in part by the social field into which it is incorporated, the practices with which it articulates and is made to resonate. What matters is not the intrinsic or historically fixed objects of culture, but the state of play in cultural relations." The text is never isolatable; it is "always caught in the network of the chains of signification which over-print it, inscribing it into the currency of our discourses" (1984b). We can deconstruct any text, disseminating and fragmenting its meaning into its different contexts and codes, displacing any claim it makes to "have" a meaning. Yet, particular texts are consistently read with the same meanings, located within the same codes, as if they were written there for all to see. Thus, every sign must be and is made to mean. There is no necessary correspondence between sign and meaning; every sign is "multi-accentual." Culture is the struggle over meaning, a struggle that takes place over and within the sign. Culture is "the particular pattern of relations established through the social use of things and techniques" (1984a).

But it is not only the sign that must be made to mean, it is the world as well. For meaning does not exhaust the social world: for example, "Class relations do not disappear because the particular historic cultural forms in which class is 'lived' and experienced at a particular period, change" (1984a). Culture is the site of the struggle to define how life is lived and experienced, a struggle carried out in the discursive forms available to us. Cultural practices articulate the meanings of particular social practices and events; they define the ways we make sense of them, how they are experienced and lived. And these already interpreted social practices can be, in turn, articulated into even larger relations of domination and resistance. It is here—in the question of the relations between discourses and the realities they purport to represent—that Hall locates the question of ideology.

Ideology is articulated (constructed) in and through language but it is not equivalent to it. There is, in fact, no necessary correspondence between a text and its politics, which is always a function of its position within an ideological field of struggle, the struggle to achieve an equivalence between language and reality. Particular ideological practices are not inscribed with their politics, any more than particular social identities are inscribed with their ideologies "on their backs." Practices do not intrinsically belong to any political position or social identity; they must be articulated into it. The meaning and political inflection of, e.g., "democracy," "freedom," or "black," or of a particular media practice, technology or social relationship are not guaranteed by its origin in a particular class structure. It is always capable of being de-articulated and re-articulated; it is a site of struggle. Hall (1981) writes that "The meaning of a cultural form and its place or position in the cultural field is not inscribed inside its form. Nor is its position fixed once and forever. This year's radical symbol or slogan will be neutralized into next year's fashion; the year after, it will be the object of profound cultural nostalgia," or, one might add, it may be rearticulated as a symbol of opposition. Moreover, "it depends...on the way concrete practices are used and implemented in concrete historical conditions, the [strength] with which certain codes are constituted as 'in dominance', the relations of struggle within the social relations of representation." It is the struggle to articulate certain codes into a position of dominance, to legitimate their claim, not only to define the meaning of cultural forms but to define the relation of that meaning (and hence, the text) to reality as one of representation, that defines the specificity of the ideological. That is, ideological practices entail a double articulation of the

signifier, first to a web of connotation (signification) and second, to real social practices and subject-positions (representation).

Ideological practices are those through which particular relations, particular chains of equivalences, are "fixed," "yoked together." They construct the necessity, the naturalness, the "reality" of particular identifications and interpretations (and of course, the simultaneous exclusion of others as fantastic, contingent, unnatural or biased). Ideology is the naturalization of a particular historical cultural articulation. What is natural can be taken for granted; it defines "common sense." Ideology "yokes together" particular social practices and relations with particular structures of meaning, thus anchoring them in a structure in which their relations to social identity, political interests, etc., have already been defined and seem inevitable.

We cannot live social reality outside of the cultural forms through which we make sense of it. Ideology involves the claim of particular cultural practices to represent reality. Yet, it is not reality that is represented (and constructed); it is rather our relation to it, the ways we live and experience reality. Ideology constructs the field and structures of our experience. It is, then, a contradictory field in which we struggle to define the systems of representation through which, paraphrasing Althusser, we live the "imaginary" relations between ourselves and our real conditions of existence (Hall, 1985). The necessity which it inscribes upon particular interpretations is grounded in the "immediacy" of experience and in the ways we are located within it. Ideology links particular social identities with particular experiences, as if the former were the necessary source of the latter. While the individual is positioned—their identity as the author/subject of experience defined—within ideological practices, the individual is never a *tabula rasa* seduced into a simple ideological structure. The ideological field is always marked by contradictions and struggles. Moreover, the individual is already defined by other discourses and practices. Ideologies must attempt to win subjects already spoken for into their representations by articulating various social identities into chains of equivalence which constitute and are articulated into structures of domination and resistance.

Such ideological struggles can only be read by examining the complex "ideological structuration" of the text and its insertion into concrete historical struggles. It is here that one must locate the most significant work that Hall accomplished and sponsored while at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. For example, Hall and Jefferson (1976) offer a theory of subcultures centering on the question of style as the articulation of an alternative ideology which offers its members a "magical" solution to the real contradictions of their social position. Similarly, the Centre's main contributions to media studies in the seventies can be understood in the context of Hall's developing theory of ideology. In particular, Hall's analytic separation of the moments of encoding and decoding (Hall et al., 1980) can be seen as one version of the struggle of articulation. In the studies around the "Nationwide" program (Brunsdon and Morley, 1978; Morley, 1980), the gap between the two moments becomes evident as the authors elucidate first the semiotic structures of the program and then, the various ways in which audience fragments interpret the program. The particular signifying practices of the text (e.g., its modes of address, its modes of representation, the ways in which it frames various "ideological problematics") not only embody real historical choices (an "encoded" or "preferred" reading) but also become the active sites at which ideological struggles are waged. Of course, not only are different "decodings" possible, but such alternative readings are themselves inflected into different political formations and relations.

While Hall wants to argue that the ideology of a text is not guaranteed, no text is free of its encoded structures and its ideological history. Texts have "already appeared in some place—and are therefore already inscribed or placed by that earlier positioning. They will be inscribed in the particular social relations which produced them... The vast majority will already be organized within certain 'systems' of classification. Each practice, each placing, slides another layer of meaning across the frame" (1984b). These "traces" of past struggles do not guarantee future articulations but they do mark the ways in which the text has already been inflected. If we are to understand ideology as a contested terrain, we must not only recognize the struggle but also learn "to read the cultural signposts and traces which history has left behind—as Gramsci says, 'without an inventory'" (1984b).

Furthermore, if we are to understand ideology as a contested terrain, we must recognize that ideological struggles are never wholly autonomous; they are themselves located within, articulated with, a broader field of economic, cultural and political struggles. Thus Hall (1985b) does not totalize the claim of the ideological; he merely seeks to put it "on the agenda" of the Left's analyses of social power. He does not deny the importance of political economy or of the state (although many political economists would deny ideology its place or reduce it to one of simple domination and false consciousness) but he readily admits that he is still unable to theorize the complex articulations that exist between them. But ideology is not reducible to struggles located elsewhere; its importance cannot be dismissed by claiming that it is determined by the nonideological. Ideological practices have their own "relative autonomy" and they produce real effects in the social formation, even outside of their own (signifying) domain.

Hegemony

The concrete processes by which ideology enters into larger and more complex relations of power within the social formation define the point at which, most explicitly, Hall's theory attempts to understand its own historical conditions of existence. It is not only ideology that must be located within a broader context of struggle but Hall's arguments as well. His preference for "theorizing from the concrete" makes his work a response to historically specific conditions: the emergence of new forms of cultural power. Hall extends the parameters of "cultural studies," calling (1981) for us to look at

the domain of cultural forms and activities as a constantly changing field...[to look] at the relations which constantly structure this field into dominant and subordinate formations...[to look] at the process by which these relations of dominance and subordination are articulated...[to place] at its centre the changing and uneven relations of force which define the field of culture—that is, the question of cultural struggle and its many forms...[to make our] main focus of attention...the relation between culture and questions of hegemony.

Hall's work increasingly draws attention to the historical fact of "hegemonic politics," and the need to "cut into" the processes by which a dominant cultural order is consistently preferred, despite its articulation with structures of domination and oppression. For example, he has turned his attention to the "autonomy" of civil society (in the so-called "democratic" nations) as a problem; how is it that the very freedom of civil and cultural institutions from direct political intervention results in the rearticulation of the already dominant structures of meaning and power? How does the appeal to "professional codes," in the production of both news and entertainment consistently reinscribe "hegemonically preferred" meanings? How are people "subject-ed" to particular definitions and practices of "freedom"?

For Hall (1984c), the appearance of "hegemony" is tied to the incorporation of the great majority of people into broadly based relations of cultural consumption. Of course, this required both the incorporation of culture into the sphere of market relations and the application of modern industrial techniques to cultural production. This was and remains a limited form of cultural enfranchisement for it left unchallenged the people's "expropriation from the processes of democratization of the means of cultural production." But it also had its real effects upon the social formation and empowered the population. Benjamin had observed that "The adjustment of reality to the masses and of the masses to reality is a process of unlimited scope, as much for thinking as for perception." Hall (1976) echoes and elaborates this:

Once the masses enter directly into the transformation of history, society and culture, it is not possible any longer to construct or appropriate the world as if reality issues in The World from the wholly individual person of the speaking, the uttering subject... We are, as historical subjects and as speakers, "spoken" by "the others." It is the end of a certain kind of Western innocence, as well as the birth-point of a new set of codes.

The appearance of "the masses" on the historical scene, especially as an agent in the scene of culture, displaces the field of cultural struggle from the expression of class conflict into a larger struggle between the people and the elite or ruling bloc. (This does not deny the continuing relevance of class contradictions but places them in relation to other contradictions: e.g., race, gender, age). As a result of this restructuring of the field of cultural relations, new forms and organizations of cultural politics emerged: this is Hall's (1986) reading of the Gramscian notion of hegemony.

Hegemony is not a universally present struggle; it is a conjunctural politics opened up by the conditions of advanced capitalism, mass communication and culture. Nor is it limited to the ideological struggle of the ruling class bloc to win the consent of the masses to its definitions of reality, although it encompasses the processes by which such a consensus might be achieved. But it also depends upon the ability of the ruling bloc (an alliance of class fractions) to secure its economic domination and establish its political power. Hegemony need not depend upon consensus nor consent to particular ideological constructions. It is a matter of containment rather than compulsion or even incorporation. Hegemony defines the limits within which we can struggle, the field of "common sense" or "popular consciousness." It is the struggle to articulate the position of "leadership" within the social formation, the attempt by the ruling bloc to win for itself the position of leadership across the entire terrain of cultural and political life. Hegemony involves the mobilization of popular support, by a particular social bloc, for the broad range of its social projects. In this way, the people assent to a particular social order, to a particular system of power, to a particular articulation of chains of equivalence by which the interests of the ruling bloc come to define the leading positions of the people. It is a struggle over "the popular," a matter of the articulated relations, not only within civil society (which is itself more than culture) but between the State (as a condensed site of power), the economic sector and civil society.

Hall (1980) describes hegemony as the struggle between "popular" and "populist" articulations, where the latter points to structures which neutralize the opposition between the people and the power bloc. He has used this framework (1978, 1980b, forthcoming 'a') to describe the unique configuration, emergence and political successes of the "new right" and Thatcherism in Britain. However, it is important that we do not romanticize the "popular" (1984a):

Since the inception of commercial capitalism and the drawing of all relations into the net of market transactions, there has been little or no "pure" culture of the people—no wholly separate folk-realm of the authentic popular, where "the people" existed in their pure state, outside of the corrupting influences. The people have always had to make something out of the things the system was trying to make of them.

Nor can we locate the popular outside of the struggle for hegemony in the contemporary world. For hegemony is never securely achieved, if even momentarily. But it does describe a different form of social and political struggle, what Gramsci called a "war of positions" (as opposed to the more traditional war of manoeuvre) in which the sites and stakes of struggles over power are multiplied and dispersed throughout the social formation. Hall argues that the left must enter into this complex set of struggles, across the entire range of social and cultural life, if it is to forge its own hegemonic politics, one dedicated to making a better life for everyone. Once again, Hall enjoins us to recognize that "people make history but in conditions not of their own making." This is Hall's model of practice, a model of our own practices, of our struggles to understand the relations, institutions and texts which populate our communicative environment, and the processes which organize it. It is a model posed against the elitism which characterizes so much of contemporary scholarly and political practice, a model committed to respecting human beings, their lives and their possibilities.

II. Cultural Studies and the Postmodern

Hall's dialectic involves the search for a middle ground which is never merely a "desired" synthesis or reconciliation of contradictions but the recognition and embodiment of struggle at every level. The tradition of cultural studies associated with the Birmingham School has been shaped by an almost continuous series of debates and challenges. (Hall 1980a; Grossberg 1983, 1984). On the one hand, it has constantly constituted itself by a critical engagement with other theoretical positions: with the humanism of the culturalists (e.g. Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson), with the structural/functionalism of the structuralists (e.g. Althusser), with the anti-humanism and textualism of deconstructionists and psychoanalytic discourse theory (e.g., *Screen* and certain versions of feminist theory). In each of these debates, cultural studies has moved onto the terrain in order to both learn and draw back from the differences. In each case, it has taken something from the other position, reshaped itself, its questions (empirical as well as theoretical) and its vocabularies. But it has refused to abandon the terrain of marxism and refused to succumb to the increasingly common pessimism of the left. On the other hand, it has constituted itself by constantly anchoring its theoretical concerns in concrete historical events and political struggles. It has opened itself, however reluctantly at times, to the recognition that history constantly makes new demands upon us, presenting us with new configurations and new questions. One can simplify this history of "anchoring points": beginning with the New Left's concern with issues of imperialism, racism and culture, continuing into questions of emerging forms of resistance, from "the margins" (in the form of subcultures) and from feminism, and arriving at the rise of the "new right" and the simultaneous "collapse" of effective left opposition.

It is within these terms that we must consider the relationship between marxist cultural studies and postmodernism.² To speak metaphorically, the war of positions between them has only begun and the result will be, not a hegemonic discourse, but a different theoretical position which has negotiated the space between them through an analysis of its own historical context. After all, both cultural studies and postmodern theory are concerned with the place of

cultural practices in historical formations and political struggles. But marxists are often reluctant to acknowledge the historical differences that constitute everyday life in the contemporary world, and too often ignore the taunting playfulness and affective extremism (terrorism?) of postmodernists, while postmodernists are often too willing to retreat from the theoretical and critical ground that marxism has won with notions of articulation, hegemony and struggle. Let me try, however briefly, to map some of the frontiers and struggles, and perhaps, to make some suggestions about where the victories and defeats may lie. To begin with, we need to distinguish three discursive domains which are all, too commonly, named with the single master signifier—the postmodern: culture, theory and history. Failing to recognize the difference has allowed some authors to slide from one domain to the other, as if one could confidently assume equivalences or correspondences. Of course, the distinction itself is strategic: one also needs to theorize the relations amongst three domains.

The most commonly discussed, if also the least interesting of these three domains of inquiry is that of cultural practice, for in fact, it takes us no further in our attempt to understand the contemporary social formation. Postmodern cultural texts (whether in architecture, literature, art, film, etc.) claim to be and in some respects, are significantly different from previous aesthetic and communicative formations.³ Many critics assert that such practices entail new cultural configurations, not only within particular texts but also across different intertextual fields. The question is, of course, how one describes that formal difference and locates its effects. In that sense, beginning with postmodern cultural texts seems to lead us right back into many of the undecidable theoretical problematics of cultural studies. For example, can we assume that a text's "postmodernism" is inscribed upon or encoded within it? What is its relation to its social and historical context? What are its politics? How is it inserted into and articulated with the everyday lives of those living within its cultural spaces, however one draws the boundaries? What is obvious is that such cultural practices are often defined by their quite explicit opposition to particular institutionalized definitions of modernism. Moreover, they wear their opposition on their surfaces, letting it play with if not define their identity. They construct themselves out of the detritus and of the past—not only of pre-modernist culture but of modernism as well—and the "ruins" of contemporary commercial culture. Does such a strategy represent a *radical* break in either culture or history? I think it unlikely (and certainly too easy a conclusion) but its powerful presence and popularity do suggest a series of questions that must be addressed about the possibilities of communication, opposition, elitism and self-definition.

The second site at which cultural studies and postmodernism clash is that of theory itself, but the distance between the positions is not as great as it appears. They share a number of fundamental commitments. Both are anti-essentialist; that is, they accept that there are no guarantees of identity or effects outside of the determinations of particular contexts. Foucault's radical contextualism is built upon the same ground as Hall's conjuncturalism. (And it is significant that neither camp has quite figured out how to produce a convincing local analysis.) At the same time, both sides reject the deconstructionists' dismissal of all essences or identities (whether of contexts or elements) with its emphasis on polysemy and undecidability, arguing instead that such moments of identity and difference are both historically effective and contextually determined. To deny that a structure is necessary or universal is not to deny its concrete reality. Nor does it entail that there are no connections across contexts; neither position embraces an absolute nominalism since the question of the constitution of the relevant context or level of abstraction must itself be left open. Both positions are concerned,

therefore, less with questions of origin and causality than with questions of effectivity, conditions of possibility, and overdetermination. Power is located precisely in the struggle to forge links, to direct the effective identity and relations of any practice, to articulate the existence, meanings, effects and structures of practices which are not guaranteed in advance.

Thus, for example, neither position is content to simply dismantle the subject nor to see it as a simple fragmentary collection of determined subject-positions. Although both begin by problematizing the claims of a unified, stable and self-determining subject, they also recognize the historical specificity and effectivity of such "subjects." Rather than merely dismantle these claims, they seek to account for them and to account, as well, for the possibilities of alternative constructions of the subject (and not merely for alternative subject-positions). In both camps, it apparently does matter who is acting/speaking, and from where. Rather than a dispersed subject, they argue for what we might describe as a migratory or nomadic subject. This "post-humanistic" subject does not exist with a unified identity (even understood as an articulated hierarchical structure of its various subject-positionings) that somehow manifests itself in every practice. Rather, it is a subject that is constantly remade, reshaped as a mobile set of relations in a fluid context. The nomadic subject is amoeba-like, struggling to win some space for itself in its local situation. The subject itself has become a site of struggle, an ongoing site of articulation with its own history, determinations and effects.

Finally both positions are also committed to the same epistemological and political strategy: the truth of a theory can only be defined by its ability to intervene into, to give us a different and perhaps better ability to come to grips with, the relations that constitute its context. If neither history nor texts speak their own truth, truth has to be won; and it is, consequently, inseparable from relations of power. Similarly, the viability of a political strategy can only be defined by its engagement with local struggles against particular relations of power and domination. This means that both positions are anti-elitist. Neither seeks to speak for the masses as a ventriloquist, but rather, to make a space in which the voices of the masses can be heard. Neither seeks to define the appropriate sites of struggle, but rather, to locate and assist those struggles that have already been opened up. And neither assumes that the masses are the passively manipulated, colonized zombies of the system, but rather, the actively struggling site of a politics in, if not of, everyday life.

Nevertheless, there are significant theoretical differences between cultural studies and postmodernism. I want to argue for the former's theory of articulation and the latter's theory of "wild realism."⁴ The failure of postmodern theory is not that it has no notion of macrostructures but rather that it has no way of theorizing the relations between different levels of abstraction, between the microphysics of power and biopolitics (Foucault) or between the child in the bubble and the simulacrum (Baudrillard). Similarly, the failure of postmodern theory is not that it denies a reality behind the surfaces of everyday life but rather that it always forgets that there are many surfaces to everyday life and that reality is produced within the relations amongst these surfaces. The factory (even in the third world) is as much a surface of our lives as is television. Because one does not frequently move across its terrain does not mean it is not having its effects. One must remember that not all surfaces are articulated or present or even effective in the same ways—that is precisely the site of the struggle over the real. In both instances, the lacuna in postmodernism is a theory of articulation.

On the other hand, the failure of cultural studies is not that it continues to hold to the importance of signifying and ideological practices but rather, that it

always limits its sense of discursive effectivity to this plane. It fails to recognize that discourses may not only have contradictory effects within the ideological, but that those ideological effects may themselves be placed within complex networks of other sorts of effects. Consequently, the particular model of articulation falls back into a structuralism of empty spaces in which every place in the ideological web is equally weighted, equally charged so to speak. The cultural field remains a product of oddly autonomous, indeterminate struggles, an amorphous field of equal differences and hence, of equivalences. Surprisingly, in the end, this seems to leave no space for the power of either the text itself or the historical actor to excite and incite historical struggles around particular discourses. While Hall argues that the audience cannot be seen as passive cultural dopes, he cannot elaborate its positivity. Neither aspect of the relation can be understood as merely a matter of the tendential structures that have, historically, already articulated a particular discourse or subject into powerful ideological positions. The critic, distanced from the effectivity of the popular, can decide neither where nor whether to struggle over any particular discourse. More importantly, the critic cannot understand why people have chosen a particular site of struggle, or how to mobilise them around such a site.

The postmodernist's recognition of the multiple planes of effectivity, "wild realism," allows the recognition that discursive fields are organized affectively ("mattering maps") as well as ideologically (Grossberg, 1984b). Particular sites are differentially invested with energies and intensities that define the resources which can be mobilised into forms of popular struggle. Affect points to the (relatively autonomous) production of what is normally experienced as moods and emotions by an asignifying effectivity.⁵ It refers to a dimension or plane of our lives that involves the enabling distribution of energies. While it is easy to conceptualize it as the originary (causal) libidinal economy postulated by psychoanalysis, one must avoid the temptation to go beyond its existence as a plane of effectivity. Moreover, affect is not the Freudian notion of disruptive (or repressed) pulsions of pleasure breaking through the organized surfaces of power; rather, it is an articulated plane whose organization defines its own relations of power and sites of struggle. And as such, like the ideological plane, it has its own principles which constrain the possibilities of struggle. And while it is true that the most powerfully visible moments of affective formations are often located in cultural activities (e.g., leisure, romance), affect is neither limited to nor isolatable within such relations. All affective relations are shaped by the materiality (and negativity) of everyday life. That is, we should not confuse affect with the positivity of enablement (e.g., pleasure and excitement) for it includes as well boredom and compulsion. Even the most obvious moments of pleasure are shaped to some extent by the continuing affectivity of particular institutions (e.g., home, work, etc.). Finally we cannot ignore the interdeterminations between different levels of effects: thus, the affective power of many cultural activities depends in part on the ideological articulations both of the activities in general (e.g., of leisure or fun) and of the specific activities in question.

Nevertheless, the recognition of an articulated plane of affect points to the existence of another politics, a politics of feeling... (good, bad or indifferent), a politics that Benjamin had acknowledged. Again this is not to deny that such an affective politics is constantly being articulated to ideological, economic and state politics, but it does not follow that it can be explained solely within the terms of such traditional political sites. Affective struggles cannot be conceptualized within the terms of theories of resistance for their oppositional quality is constituted, not in a negative dialectics, but by a project of or struggle over empowerment, an empowerment which energizes and connects specific social

moments, practices and subject positions. Thus, if we want to understand particular cultural practices, we need to ask how they empower their audiences and how the audiences empower the practices; that is, how the very materiality (including ideological) of cultural practices functions within an affective economy of everyday life. It is ironic that so much contemporary writing on popular culture offers accounts of affectively powerful texts which are always mired within what Benjamin called "organizations of pessimism." Hall himself has recognized (1984c) the need to theorize and describe the "sensibility of mass culture" but has, thus far, left the question unanswered. But without an answer, the enormous power of contemporary culture (especially the mass media) and the investment that we make in it cannot be adequately approached. I would suggest that this sensibility depends in fact on the particular historical relations between ideological and affective struggles, between resistance and empowerment, that surround the mass media and contemporary social struggles. It is here, in fact, in an understanding of "the popular" as an affective plane, that one can find any grounds for an "optimism of the will" today, any space to negotiate between utopianism and nihilism.

The third and perhaps most important domain of postmodern work involves the attempt to understand the specificity of the contemporary historical formation. This is also the most controversial and certainly the one most fraught with difficulties and dangers. Here postmodern irony and excess operate against themselves: a theory of the collapse of the distinction between elite and popular becomes a new elitism; a theory that denies innocent and totalized descriptions offers itself as an innocent and totalized description; a theory that denies the new in favor of bricolage, not only offers itself as new, but announces that the absence of the new is a new situation; and a theory of the impossibility of metanarrative becomes its own metanarrative absence. More importantly, a theory that celebrates otherness fails to acknowledge the difference between experiences, real historical tendencies and cultural discourses and meanings, as well as the complex relations that exist between them. Moreover, even within the specific domains of experience and discourse, it fails to recognize the uneven and contradictory relations that exist within and between different sites of postmodern effects: history, subjectivity, values, reality, politics. I would agree with Hall that to read history as rupture, to see the present as the site of the apocalypse (the end of the old, the beginning of the new) is a powerful ideological moment. Echoing Hall, if reality was never as real as we have constructed it, it's not quite as unreal as we imagine it; if subjectivity was never as coherent as we imagine it, it's not quite as incoherent as we fantasize it; and if power was never as simple or monolithic as we fantasize it (reproducing itself, requiring giants and magical subjects to change it), it's not quite as dispersed and unchallengeable as we fear.

Thus, I would argue that Baudrillard's theory of the simulacrum confuses the collapse of a particular ideology of the real for the collapse of reality; it confuses the collapse of a particular ideology of the social (articulated into public and private) with the end of the social. But that does not mean that it does not offer important insights into the changing ways in which the real is effective in the social formation and its organization of power. To the extent that Baudrillard's theory denies its own limits, it conflates the social formation with a particular set of effects, with the plane of simulation, rendering all of social reality the simple product of media causality. And in the end, that is no different than those who would reduce reality or desire or power to meaning. Contradicting itself, the position conflates ideology (in the form of the alibi or law of value) with the multiple and complex sites of power, enabling him to assume that only a refusal of any difference constitutes struggle. It conflates the multiple and fragmentary

social positionings of the masses with a single configuration of or on the surface of the social body. The great burden of these reductions is placed upon the concept of implosion, as both indifference (in the masses who amusedly and in fascination live the media hype) and deterrence (as a control system), as both an ecstatic possibility and a catastrophic inevitability. But all of this says merely that Baudrillard, for all of the postmodern speed of his writing practice, fails to adequately theorize the sites of our postmodernity; he ends up being one of its most enjoyable (if horrifying, or perhaps, because horrifying) texts rather than its most reliable analyst.

The specificity of the contemporary social formation is more complex than simple descriptions of the simulacrum or late capitalism (commodification, bureaucratization, infotech, etc.) would suggest, although these are real events with real effects. Thus, the problem is not with the postmodernists' descriptions as such but with the rather grandiose status they assign to their descriptions. The questions of postmodernity as a historical reality, whether experiential or tendential, have to be theorized within the context of the theory of articulation and wild realism, that is, within the spaces between cultural studies and postmodernism. This has two important consequences. First, from the perspective of cultural studies, it locates the critique of postmodernism in the project of inflecting such descriptions into a less global and more consistent context of theorizing. For example, we can reread Baudrillard's theory as a contribution to the analysis of the changing politics of representation in history. Baudrillard has described three planes of discursive effects which not only compete with and displace one another but which may be simultaneously operative and historically organized in any particular formation. Thus, rather than making a global and ontological argument, Baudrillard's theory of the simulacrum marks the local articulations (and power relations) among three planes of discursive effectivity: representation, mediation and modelling.

Second, from the perspective of postmodernism, it locates the critique of cultural studies in the project of detailing the determining displacements, gaps and in some cases, even ruptures that have become constitutive of our contemporary existence. There are powerful new historical determinations (e.g., the destructability and disposability of the planet; significant redistributions of wealth, population and power; new structures of commodity production; new media of communication), ideological and affective experiences (e.g., the collapse of visions of the future and of transcendental values capable of giving shape and direction to our lives; an increasing sense of justified paranoia, terror and boredom). Hall has already opened up these spaces by giving a central role to questions about the relations between the media and the masses (as it is defined in Benjamin's theory of history) and between leadership and the popular (in Gramsci's theory of hegemony). But they remain undeveloped and one must assume that this is due, in part, to the difficulty of accounting for their effectivity within the traditional marxist categories of power.

The fact remains that such "postmodern events" appear to have an increasingly significant place in our everyday lives and that the discourses which anchor themselves in these events appear to have a powerful place in our cultural relations. Both postmodernism and cultural studies need to find ways of describing the complex contexts—the conjunctural formations—within which the possibilities of struggle are shaped, grasped and enacted.

NOTES

1. For a more complete biography of Stuart Hall, see my entry in *The Biographical Dictionary of Neo-Marxism*, Robert Gorman (ed.), Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985, pp. 197-200. For a systematic overview of cultural studies, see Stuart Hall with Jennifer Daryl Slack and Lawrence Grossberg, *Cultural Studies*, London: Macmillan, forthcoming.
2. There is an ongoing debate about the relationship between post-structuralism (as a theoretical and cultural practice) and postmodernism. My own assumption is that the former represents the last stages of the modernist epistemological problematic: the relationship between the subject and the forms of mediation, in which the problem of reality is constantly displaced. Postmodernism on the other hand moves from epistemology to history, from subjectivity to a recovery of the real, from mediation and universality to effectivity and contextuality. The conflation of these positions has serious consequences for the analysis of both cultural practices and historical context. It often leads one back into a politics of codes and communications, of the construction and deconstruction of boundaries, despite what may be interesting and insightful analysis of the postmodern context of contemporary life. See Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s," *Socialist Review*, no. 80, March/April 1985, pp. 65-107.
3. Postmodern cultural practices are often characterized as denying totality, coherence, closure, depth (both expressive and representational), meaning, teleology, narrativity, history, freedom, creativity, and hierarchy; and as celebrating discontinuity, fragmentation, rupture, materiality, surfaces, language as intervention, diversity, chance, contextuality, egalitarianism, pastiche, heterogeneity without norms, quotations without quotation marks, parodies without originals.
4. Postmodernism's lack of a theory of articulation results in the "flatness" (albeit defined by a multiplicity of vectors and planes) of its analysis of contextual effectivity. In neither postmodernism nor cultural studies is articulation ever complete. In cultural studies, no articulation is either complete or final; no term is ever finally sewn up. This is the condition of possibility of its dialectic of struggle. In postmodernism not every element is articulated or stitched into the fabric of any particular larger structure. This is a crucial part of its analysis of contemporaneity. Speaking metaphorically, a theory of articulation augments vertical complexity while a theory of wild realism augments horizontal complexity.
5. Theorising the concept of affect involves deconstructing the opposition between the rational and the irrational in order to undercut, not only the assumed irrationality of desire but also, the assumed rationality of signification and ideology. Current theories of ideology, rooted in structuralism, have too easily abandoned the insights embodied in notions of "the structure of feeling" (Williams) and "the texture of lived experience" (Hoggart). (I am grateful to John Clarke for his observations on this point.)

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